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Edited by
KATHLEEN BLISS

News-Letter

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DEAR MEMBER,

Each number of the News-Letter owes so much to the thought and suggestions of its friends and supporters that the use of the editorial "we" is not only conventional, but strictly accurate. There are, however, very rare occasions which seem to demand the use of the first person singular, and this is perhaps one of them.

THE GENEVA MEETINGS OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

It has been my immensely good fortune to be in Geneva for a week as a member of the British delegation to the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches. The word "provisional" has to appear in every description of the Council until its first assembly has met, for it was in process of formation before the war and although its work has grown and expanded, its exact constitution is not yet fixed.

The Council owns an attractive house¹ which serves as its offices and as a centre for the huge volume of work which is now being done by its reconstruction department. This was our place of meeting, and when we arrived it was already a buzzing hive of activity, for the first complete meeting of the International Missionary Council to be held since before the war was coming to a close. The delegates to both conferences spent a day in what was called an informal ecumenical exchange. Leaders of the Churches from all over the world reported on what were the most significant events in their areas during the six years of war. Much of it we might perhaps have read in papers or memoranda sitting at home, but the time given for question and debate made it a memorable experience, bringing into comparison and contrast the condition of the Church and the problems which it has to face in all quarters of the globe from China to Mexico. Outstanding perhaps in interest for us in this country, who know so little of it, was the description of the Church in Japan given by Dr. Douglas Horton who was one of the three delegates of the American Churches to visit Japan a

¹ 17 Route de Malagnou, Geneva. General Secretary, Dr. W. Visser 't Hooft.

London Office, 21 Bloomsbury Street, W.C. 1. Secretary, The Rev. Oliver Tomkins.

few months ago. The devastation from bombing has been on a vast scale. In some cities *all* the Church buildings have been destroyed and congregations scattered, along with the rest of the population, into the country-side. The effect of this is to cause the Japanese Church, which has hitherto been entirely urban, to think of its responsibilities for evangelism in the country-side among the mass of the peasantry, of which the Japanese army was largely formed. The Churches in America are far more aware of the need for the reconstruction of Christian work in the Far East than we are, and the unexpected ease with which understanding has been established (largely due to the clear-sightedness of Japanese Christians about their nation's policy) has been one of the surprising events in the life of the Churches in the last year.

The day ended with a great service in Calvin's Church, the Cathedral of St. Peter. To me, and to everyone else to whom I spoke, the real meaning and purpose of this world gathering was made plain in this service. The vast Church was so crowded that it would have been difficult to find room for one person more. The long procession of Church leaders filed up the nave. It contained archbishops, bishops, and leading Churchmen of the Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed Churches of Europe, and leaders of the Free Churches of Great Britain and the United States. Side by side walked men whose countries had been at war. The prayers were said in English, the singing was in French, the Gospel was read in Greek, and three addresses were given, by Dr. Miao of China in English, Bishop Berggrav of Norway in German and Pastor Niemöller in French. They spoke simply of the faithfulness of humble Christians in times of pressure and distress, of the unbroken life of the Church in the Holy Spirit throughout the war, and of the penitence and renewal which bring together in Christ those who have done each other grievous wrong. As I stood on the steps leading up from the courtyard of the Cathedral and watched this great crowd of worshippers dispersing with the gaunt towers of the Cathedral disappearing into the darkness above my head and the stout walls of the old city falling away into the darkness at my feet, I knew as a fact not only of belief but of experience, that our gropings towards unity are not attempts to federate Churches and bring together separate self-sufficient units. As the Church of Christ is in his mind and intention one, wholeness is the true nature of the Church, and the search for a true unity, is not an attempt to create something which does not exist or to add something to the Church's life (in the fashion of an "optional extra"), but is rather the removing of all the accretions which hide from our eyes what is already there. At that moment it seemed impossible that the gates of hell should prevail against a Church at one with itself in the wor-

ship of its Lord, and impossible that the half of Christendom which looks to another cathedral of St. Peter as its home should stand for ever divided from us and we from it. Modern life, including that of the Churches, is so bare of symbols of compelling power, that experiences of this kind which, without changing very much what we consciously think or do, enter into our souls and give new power, are rare and correspondingly rich.

THE WORK OF THE WORLD COUNCIL DURING THE WAR

The diversity out of which this experience of unity had been given was soon manifest when we met next day and began the three long days of committee work. If we had been less pressed for time, I think more difficulties would have come to the surface, arising from differences of history, experience and theological language. I am not suggesting anything in the nature of quarrels; we were held together both by the continuance of the experience of oneness in Christ and by the knowledge that there were urgent tasks which we wished jointly to undertake. But when, for example, during the discussion of a message to go from the Committee to the constituent Churches, a continental Lutheran said that we could only speak if God gave us the Word and we would allow it to have free course through us, his fellow-continentals heartily assented, but an American turned to me and said, "I can't make out what the Lutherans mean by the "Word" in this sense. Is it what the Groups mean by guidance?" This is only a tiny instance of the kind of difficulty experienced when Churches try to speak together. The marvel is not that these differences exist, which one would expect in a broken Christendom, but that they are transcended by the great common Christian experiences. And there are two main strands of ecumenical life, united in the World Council of Churches but preserving their separate entities, which are enabling the Churches to speak to, and understand each other. One is the slow process of discussion and exchange which goes on through the work of the Faith and Order conferences and their continuing studies, and the other is the co-operative efforts of the Churches to address themselves to practical undertakings.

Our committee work fell into two roughly distinguished categories. We heard what had been done during the war by the officers of the Council and those associated with them to keep the channels of communication open between Churches when they were closed between States. Bishop Wurm of Württemberg described how the periodic visits of one of the study secretaries of the Council were to German Church leaders almost the only break in their long-continued sense of being beleaguered within Germany and cut off from Christendom outside. At the risk of his life he made journeys through Germany, into Sweden, back again to Germany and into

occupied countries. Incidentally, wherever he went he carried with him copies of the Christian News-Letter which were handed round and eagerly read. I met a number of people from the occupied countries and from Germany whose appreciation of the News-Letter during the war years was embarrassing in its warmth.

The work of ecumenical study, now twelve years old, went on, though in a restricted form, all through the war with its centre in Geneva. From the same centre a chaplaincy service was organized for prisoners of war. Visits to camps and a postal service were arranged. The work was shared with the Y.M.C.A. and the Bible Societies. Over a million specially prepared books and pamphlets and 400,000 Bibles and Testaments for prisoners in French, German and English were distributed. We were told of a French ex-prisoner who at the recent Assembly of the French Protestant Church held at Nîmes, spoke of the power of the Holy Spirit which had come to him, and fellow-prisoners, through this ministry, sending them home again after the war with new vision and power. Now the Council is ministering to thousands of Christians among displaced persons, who are cut off from their own communions and yet are enabled to know that they have a spiritual home in the *Una Sancta*.

The general secretary, Dr. Visser 't Hooft, described how in the early years of the war it seemed impossible to maintain relationships between the Churches, as one plan after another had to be jettisoned. "But," he continued, "right in the midst of war the tide turned. New and even larger tasks presented themselves. And what the contacts between the Churches lost in frequency, they gained in intensity and depth." Before the war forty churches had asked for membership of the Council. Since the war began more than fifty other churches have decided to join the Council—an act of sheer faith, for the Council did not then exist except in its provisional form. The question of membership of any world body is an exceedingly difficult one, and the committee had to devise means, on the one hand, to prevent every little sect of mushroom-growth from claiming the status of a Church and claiming membership, and on the other hand, to ensure that no Church was excluded merely on grounds that it was small. Declaration of faith and evidence of stability are to be the criteria. The committee turned its back on the idea that a federation of Churches is an adequate substitute for the *Una Sancta*. "No Church needs to fear," said the general secretary, "that its membership in the Council will mean that it will be forced into organic unity with other Churches, but all Churches must realize that in the Council they will be confronted with the inescapable question: why they remain separated in many ways from Churches with which they have actual fellowship in other ways. The great significance of a full integration of the Faith and Order movement in the World Council

lies precisely in that Faith and Order reminds us of the true goal and does not allow us to rest content with the very imperfect measure of unity which we have to-day." One of the tasks of the committee was to lay plans for a first assembly of the Churches to be held probably in Copenhagen in 1948.

PRESENT UNDERTAKINGS AND FUTURE PLANS

Undoubtedly the greatest task which the Council has in hand at the moment is its reconstruction work for the Churches in Europe. This department has a staff of thirteen. Most of this number is made up of persons appointed by Churches in Great Britain and America to deal with their own plans for relief. But instead of allowing each great donor Church to carry on its work independently of the others, all these members of staff are used in accordance with a general plan prepared by the department on Reconstruction under the chairmanship of Dr. Hutchison Cockburn. The thirteen have their base at the Geneva office but are usually away on tours of discovery, consulting with Church groups and interdenominational groups all over Europe as to their needs. It has been realized that the mere collection and disbursement of money is a travesty of Christian charity, if no relationship is established between donor and recipient and no attempt is made to sift with the utmost care all the needs and use the money in the most fully creative fashion possible. One was struck in the committee by the abundant vitality and the over-flowing generosity of the Americans. Their general attitude was that nothing was impossible for fellow Christians who are in desperate need. Nor are they alone, for among the most touching of the gifts received is one from Denmark for the bombed Churches of Britain.

The converted stables of 17 Route de Malagnou are now a clearing-house for material aid, and lorries carrying goods were a feature of the traffic during our stay. Down below the house, in the cellars, was a huge store of Bibles in dozens of languages, given to relieve the acute shortage of Bibles which prevails almost all over Europe to-day. I had not realized until I talked to continental friends what the famine for the Word of the Lord, of which the prophet Amos spoke, could mean in actual fact. The people of Europe are hungry to read and hungry for news of fellow Christians in a way in which we with our free press and our constant flow of Bibles and Christian books can scarcely understand.

Looking ahead to our future work the main question we had to ask ourselves was how this deeply enriching experience of coming to know and share the thoughts of other Christians could be released from the narrow confines of a few Church leaders, so that it would flow as an invigorating stream through the life of all our Churches. A generation of young people has grown up during the war almost

entirely limited in its experience to the life of its own nation, or even of its own locality. Some in the British and American forces have been fortunate enough to make unexpected contacts with Christians in other parts of the world¹. The hundreds of young people from Churches and Christian organizations all over the world who took part in the World Conference of Christian Youth in Amsterdam in August, 1939, found it an experience of enduring value, and with a view to giving a similar stimulus to ecumenical activity, one of the first meetings to be held will be another Youth Conference next year. Preparations are already reaching an advanced stage. In order to give more enduring and lasting form to means of meeting this need for fellowship between younger people, the committee accepted plans for the acquisition of a large house near Geneva to become an ecumenical institute, open to young men and women of all Churches who can there attend courses of training in Church leadership and—far more important—share a common Christian life together in a community which will do most of its own work.

There is much more that could be said. These were days packed with interest and hard work. Every minute of the time not spent under the eagle eye of our admirable chairman, Pastor Marc Boegner, president of the Reformed Church in France, was filled with discussion and with a lively exchange of ideas and experiences. Much of this, I hope, will find its way into the News-Letter at a later date. I was greatly touched by the numbers of complete strangers, working in Geneva and elsewhere in Switzerland, either on the staffs of papers, in international voluntary societies, or in government service, who, hearing that I was to be at the meetings, took the trouble to come and see me and tell me what they thought of the News-Letter. One man, for example, regularly translates parts of the News-Letter into German and sends it through his own organization into Germany. He showed me a letter from the President of Bavaria, thanking him for a German translation of a Supplement by Barbara Ward and asking for a further hundred copies. I take all this not as an invitation to rest on our laurels, but as an indication of the immense opportunity which lies before those who are concerned, as those of us with primary responsibility for the News-Letter are concerned, to communicate the gifts of grace which Christ has given to his Church from one member of it to another across the world.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Bliss

¹ For example Dr. Henry P. Van Dusen in his book *They Found the Church There*, describes, mostly in the form of letters from soldiers, the discovery by the Americans of the Christian Church in the South Pacific Islands.

TWO ADDRESSES GIVEN AT THE ECUMENICAL SERVICE IN THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. PETER, GENEVA, ON FEBRUARY 20th, 1946.

I

BY THE REV. EIVIND BERGGRAV, BISHOP OF OSLO

You have asked that representatives from the occupied countries should speak to you here. You have already heard about China. Now I come as a representative of the small nations of Europe and I am embarrassed by the responsibility laid on me of speaking for a privileged Church. For that is the first thing I want to say. You must not talk too much about our sufferings. You must not call certain Churches, as I have heard it done, "heroic" Churches. That is wrong! We are privileged Churches and we have perhaps more to account for than other Churches. The Scriptures say: "By their fruits ye shall know them." The question now is what fruits will those Churches bear which have had the greatest experience of God's grace during these difficult years. The first can very easily become the last in God's Kingdom. Yes, if we could just be the last, and not be turned out of the Kingdom!

It is always dangerous to be favoured by God. That was our lot. And I want to take this opportunity to emphasize just one point. The experience that strengthened us more than any other was that God, who in the past so easily seemed somewhat unreal in the modern world, became for us the closest and strongest daily reality. Holy Scripture, God's Word, was the most real word that existed. We had in the Bible our first, best and strongest means of speech. In prison we were literally at war with the Gestapo on account of the Bible. When I myself was interned and was allowed to send a short letter to my wife each week, I wrote after the First Sunday in Advent, 1942: "The Gospel for yesterday was remarkable: I am come to set the captives at liberty, to bring freedom to the oppressed." My wife was then called before the Chief of Police and told that her husband was henceforth forbidden to quote the Bible. "The Bible is much too topical."

God's Word is topical for all men, even for those who are said to be unbelievers—though more men believe than are themselves aware of the fact, so that even these so-called unbelievers found the Bible to be something extraordinary. If a man merely caught sight of a Bible lying on a table he felt: There is the toughest reality in the world.

When the Bible is persecuted, then God's Word becomes a living power in the soul of a people.

There is one word that expressed the basis of this experience, the name that God called himself when he said : " I am that I am." I would like you all to be able to understand that the word GOD was reality, everyday reality, not only in the hour of prayer, on Sunday morning, not God in the Church only—but God in battle, God in suffering, an actual God even when we could not for the moment find him ; in the darkness when one had abandoned God, he was nevertheless paradoxically God, the reality. We could not get away from him. He was there. The Lord's Prayer took on new meaning ; in the first line there is the word : *Thou art*.

To say that we were helped is not to say that we were always helped as we would have liked to have been helped. The truth is that there were hours, days, weeks, months, when we desperately questioned God because his purpose was quite hidden from us by our suffering—not one's own suffering, which is never the hardest, but when we were forced to realize how fearfully the innocent suffered and how those who suffered had increasingly more and more to bear, how they were tortured by the enemy—sons, daughters, husbands—and we asked " God, where art Thou ? " Those were the hours when Christ became real. There can be no belief in God that does not come through Christ. In our darkest and hardest hours, in the experience of being forsaken by God, Christ is with us for he too has been through this experience.

The Spirit of God moves in many ways. He works through small things as well, through events that no one sets much store by and that seem insignificant—and through people too, neighbours ! These small things constitute the holy fellowship to which Christ has called us. We were made aware of this fellowship too by the way that God's Word was passed on from man to man and in the way that people prayed for one another. We were supported by the intercessions of our fellow Christians. In this way we experienced fellowship as alone God can grant it to man.

Strangely enough it was precisely in our isolation, when all legal communication with the outside world was strictly forbidden, that we in Norway really learned for the first time the meaning of " ecumenical," which is the living, inner fellowship of Christians in the world. There we sat surrounded by walls. But we knew that over the sea in England, in America, in Canada, on the other side of the mountains in Sweden, south of us in Denmark, all over Europe and right down here in Geneva hearts were beating for us, prayers were being offered for us. Illegally we heard : " They are praying for you." I received a letter from Geneva : " Take comfort. Your

friends in the Churches all over the world are praying for Norwegians too." We thanked God then.

I must tell you about an incident that happened while I was in prison. A peasant woman wanted to bring me a bottle of milk. She succeeded in getting past the guards and handed me the bottle through the kitchen window. She then whispered : " Bishop, my husband listened yesterday to the forbidden radio. The Archbishop of Canterbury has prayed for you." She ran quickly away, but the news remained. It was as if God had suddenly broken all the walls asunder, and heaven and earth were open and there was free air and Christian fellowship.

Here I have a confession to make : I wondered anxiously what it would be like to meet to-day with friends from all the different parts of the Christian world. The surprise, for me at any rate, was that it was no surprise. It was quite natural. Natural because we have lived together more closely during these five years than we did when we could communicate with the outside world. We have prayed together much more, we have listened together much more to God's Word, our hearts have been alongside one another. I find nothing strange in seeing here to-day Boegner, Canterbury, Chichester, Indians and Chinese. It is just the manifestation of what we already knew, that the universal fellowship of God's Churches is no longer weak but has been established by him, and through it the experience of the war now lives and works. The time is past when Christian fellowship in the world was a groping experiment. Christ has said to us during the war : " My Christians, you are one." Thank God, for it is not the general rule in the world that living fellowship can be taken for granted after the peace.

Let the Church of Christ be the fire in the forge of the world ! For it is cold now in the world. Even you, his potential instruments, are cold and therefore cannot be shaped to his Will. Come ! Pray ! Be one in Christ and penetrated through and through with his fire. May he bless his Churches in their tremendous responsibility.

II

BY PASTOR MARTIN NIEMOELLER

The Lord said to us : " Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth " (Luke 15. 7).

An ecumenical meeting, such as we are holding at the moment, naturally turns our eyes and thoughts to wider horizons. In fact we are reminded that " the Lord reigneth and that the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved," and also that Christians of all countries are gathered together in the Church to become disciples

of our one Lord and Master Jesus Christ. Christianity has need of this world-wide vision if it is not to stagnate in a self-sufficient egoism or become disheartened by national isolation.

During these past twelve years we have learned, we Christians in Germany—and with what gratitude—that we were borne up and sustained in our loneliness by the prayers and concern of our brothers all over the world, who were interceding on our behalf with God. I shall never forget my old father's words during his last visit to me in the Gestapo office at the Oranienburg concentration camp. As he left he said: "My child, the Esquimaux in Canada and the Bataks in Sumatra send you their greetings and are praying for you."

And last October when the representatives of the World Council came to Stuttgart to renew contact with the German Churches, my friends and I went through this same experience; from the bottom of my heart I have thanked God that, in spite of the barriers which separate the nations, we were allowed to know the brotherhood which the disciples knew; to understand that, instead of hatred and hostility, the love of God reigns according to the word of the apostle: "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it."

But the ecumenical fellowship of the Church of Christ lives by what each member brings to it; that is to say, by the special gifts that the Lord of the Church has entrusted to each one. That is why I am led to speak here of the work that our Lord is doing amongst us in Germany to-day.

We have made a discovery which has surprised and frightened us. This discovery has surprised us more than the revelations of the Nazi terror; it has frightened us much more deeply than the unforeseeable consequences of our defeat. It is no new discovery but a rediscovery of an ancient truth which has fallen into oblivion. We have discovered that *sin* and *guilt* are not empty and meaningless words which pastors brandish in their sermons, but that, on the contrary, they are clothed with a terrible truth and a terrible reality which leave man desolate and in despair and from which there is no escape.

Now that the fog of lying propaganda has dispersed, a mountain of sins and crimes rises before our eyes. And our dismay is so great that none of us dares to look it in the face, and each of us tries to shut his eyes to it as if it were a bad dream. And other patches of fog are still lifting, revealing new sins, new crimes which we are tempted to repudiate and cover up for fear of falling into a bottomless pit of despair. "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

It is easy to understand that everyone tries to deny his guilt and to explain it away both with others and with his own conscience. "But I did not kill, I did not steal, I did not bear false witness, I did not want this evil to happen." Here speaks the old instinct of self-preservation; it has to speak in this way, for who can live with this burden of crimes on his conscience?

It is then in my country that the Church of Christ enters fully into the situation. It is there that she is at work and proclaims the Gospel of her Lord. If ever there was a desperate undertaking, that was one! For under this present judgement who would have dared still to believe in the love of God? Who would have dared still to hope that out of these sufferings good might come?

In fact only two ways seem open: either to abandon oneself to despair, or fiercely to deny all guilt. But there is no way out by these two roads; they lead only to death. And what of the Church? In this chaos of despair and crimes, has she still something to give? Should she not rather confine herself to the silent work of the Good Samaritan and tend the most serious wounds so that death shall not be too sad or too hard? Yes, with Isaiah I demand, "What shall I cry?"

The Church in Germany to-day is learning to listen to the true Good News, the Gospel—and we are beginning to understand once again that the mercy of God exists precisely for "them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" and that "the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost," and that the Lord Jesus Christ, to-day as of old, "came not to call the righteous but the sinners." For us Christians in Germany to-day it is manifest that the call "Repent ye" is the true Gospel. We dare, and we are able, to turn again to God, for Christ calls us and through Christ God calls us: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." God loves us with a love so great and so marvellous that he gave his Son for our sins. We have no need therefore to deny our sin and to carry it with us to our death. We can turn to the living God, and this conversion leads to life.

That is the news which holds us in its grip. And by the light of this love, by which God seeks us, we recognize that our sin is great and our guilt is heavy. We have not loved God, for our life has been empty and poverty-stricken; we have not understood that *we Christians* were the guilty ones and that we ought to have confessed *our* guilt. That is why we are listening to this call to repentance and are bringing the good news to others, that we are allowed to turn to God, for God has granted us the gift of his love that we may live a new life in Christ who himself is the embodiment of pardon and newness of life. It was in these terms that the Council of the

Evangelical Church in Germany at its meeting in Stuttgart last October spoke to the ecumenical delegates, expressing the hope that God would again entrust our Church with a task amongst our own defeated people.

Unquestionably, this call to repentance and to faith comes only to each man individually, for it demands from each one of us, from you and from me, a personal decision which no one can take for us. That is why we have no grand programme of reforms that would change the spiritual condition of our people overnight. But we shall accomplish our task, trusting in the promise of our God: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please."

Is that little, still too little to go on? "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." God has his plans which he does not disclose to us. But if God rejoices at the return of one sinner, then we may rest assured that he will fulfil his promises according to his marvellous wisdom. Once before—and more than once—he has done great things through one sinner who repented—through the apostle Paul. He will do it again to-day, if it be his will. In complete obedience and faithfulness therefore we can carry out what we have been asked to do, and to that we shall now set our hands in Germany. By the same token we hope to take the share that God expects the Christians in Germany to take in the whole ecumenical work. That is why I am testifying here, my dear friends and brothers, that the Gospel God asks us to proclaim anew is a message of joy and liberation. We are able to turn again to God, for Jesus Christ himself has borne our sins; we are able to turn again to God, for the Lord Jesus Christ himself has granted us the gift of new life.

In very truth you can return to him, even if you alone travel this road, for "there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." Amen.

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